

York County Office  
100 County Drive  
P.O. Box 532  
Yorktown, Virginia 23690-0532  
(757) 890-4940 / Fax 890-4033  
E-Mail: [ex199@vt.edu](mailto:ex199@vt.edu)  
Web Site: [www.yorkcounty.gov/vce](http://www.yorkcounty.gov/vce)

*Excerpts from the 2003 Virginia Master Gardener Handbook*

## Problem Trees

When selecting a tree to plant in the yard, it is nice to know exactly what you are getting. Many people plant a sapling, enjoy it for a few years, and then discover some serious disadvantages when the tree reaches an effective height. The following trees have certain disadvantages of which you should be aware before you plant them in your yard.



*Acer negundo* (**Box Elder**): This tree has weak wood, is short-lived, and is susceptible to box elder bugs.



*Acer saccharinum* (**Silver Maple**): One of the worst trees available because of its brittle wood and tendency to become hollow and hazardous. Its shallow surface roots can ruin sidewalks and driveways and prevent turfgrass growth underneath. It is also susceptible to insects, and outlawed in some localities.



*Ailanthus altissima* (**Tree-of-Heaven**): A weed tree that sprouts up everywhere and has a disagreeable odor. It is outlawed in some cities.



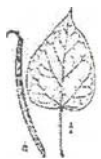
*Albizia julibrissin* (**Mimosa**): Susceptible to Mimosa Wilt (root fungus) and webworm and has weak, fast growth.

*Aralia spinosa* (**Devils-walkingstick**): This small, thorny tree can spread rapidly by rootsuckers, creating a maintenance problem.

*Betula papyrifera* (**White Clump Birch**): Authorities say it isn't likely to do well where the mean July temperature is above 70°F. Once weakened, the bronze birch borer will kill it. It has attractive white bark, but is short-lived.



*Betula pendula* (**European White Birch**): This birch is susceptible to insects and environmental stress.



*Catalpa* species: All catalpas have messy flowers and seed pods.



*Ginkgo biloba* (**Ginkgo**): Do not plant the female ginkgo whose fruits have an offensive odor.



*Juglans nigra* (**Black Walnut**): Though a valuable wood, the tree roots produce a toxin that is harmful to certain other plants, and anthracnose will defoliate it during August and September.

*Laburnum anagyroides* (**Golden Chain Tree**): This tree is subject to environmental stress.

*Malus* species (**Crabapple**): Some varieties are defoliated by scab diseases every year. The fruits can be messy. Always plant disease-resistant cultivars.



*Melia azedarach* (**Chinaberry**): This tree has weak wood, seeds that are a pest, and many suckers.



*Morus* species (**Mulberry**): Mulberries have messy fruit.



*Paulownia tomentosa* (**Empress Tree**): Its pretty flowers become thousands of seeds which sprout everywhere, though its wood brings a high price in the Orient.



*Platanus occidentalis* (**Sycamore**): Leaves and seeds from this tree are messy; it has brittle wood and surface roots. Anthracnose, a late spring blight that occurs most years, will attack it.



*Populus* species (**Lombardy poplar, white or silver poplar, hybrid poplars, cottonwood**): These trees have brittle wood and surface root systems, but their main problem is their susceptibility to canker diseases which disfigure and usually kill them. Some also have messy flowers or send up suckers from their roots. The Lombardy poplar is very short-lived.

[Note that the tulip poplar (or yellow poplar or tulip tree) is not a poplar, but rather the genus *Liriodendron*. While the tulip tree has brittle wood, it is a good tree. ]

*Prunus serotina* (**Black Cherry**): Has objectionable fruit, is susceptible to insects, and attracts many birds.



*Robinia pseudoacacia* (**Black Locust**): It is good for fence posts and firewood, but not for landscaping. It has brittle wood, is susceptible to cankers, and leaf miners render it unattractive by summer. Can also create a weed problem as it sprouts readily.

*Salix* species (**Willows**): These trees have very brittle wood and are susceptible to canker diseases. Their roots will clog sewer and drain pipes that have cracks. Some are attractive on large lots.



*Sorbus* species (**Mountain Ash**): This tree likes cool climates, but is subject to damage from sawflies, borers, scale, and fire blight.

*Ulmus americana* (**American Elm**): Until Dutch elm disease can be controlled, this long-time favorite should not be planted. It is also susceptible to elm leafbeetle.

*Ulmus pumila* (**Siberian Elm**): Its brittle wood will result in severe damage in ice storms, and its seeds and suckering habit make it a pest. Also very short-lived. Note that the lacebark, sometimes called Chinese elm (*Ulmus parvifolia*), is often confused with the Siberian Elm, but is far superior.

Fruit trees (and fruit trees that only flower): These are often subject to Japanese beetle infestation and borers. Fruit trees require a genuine commitment; don't try to get into them halfway.

**The following trees will give you trouble if they are not planted correctly:**



*Abies* species (**Fir**): They need deep, fertile, welldrained soils and a cool, moist climate.

*Acer saccharum* (**Sugar Maple**): Sugar maples grow well enough to produce maple syrup only in western Virginia's mountains.



*Picea abies* (**Norway Spruce**): Subject to environmental stress.



*Picea pungens* (**Colorado Blue Spruce**): Virginia is not at all like Colorado. Most spruces lose their attractiveness in a few years.



*Pinus palustris* (**Longleaf Pine**): They do not tolerate our area well, as they are subject to environmental stress.



*Pinus strobus* (**White Pine**): This is a very large tree and won't tolerate overcrowding. It also dislikes disturbed soil and suffers from air pollution and salt damage. It does not like extreme heat or poor drainage.

*Pinus sylvestris* (**Scotch Pine**): The Scotch Pine is subject to environmental stress and pine tip moth.



*Tsuga canadensis* (**Hemlock**): Once established, hemlock does pretty well. It requires rich soil and shelter from wind and sun to get off to a good start. It is susceptible to infestation by a woolly adelgid, which can result in serious damage.